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ABSTRACT

In this paper, the cultural pluralism which exists in New Mexico is discussed. Most citizens of New Mexico have been placed in 1 of 3 categories: Indians, Anglo-Americans, and Spanish Americans. Since Spanish and English are the official languages of New Mexico, making it the only officially bilingual state, the Spanish American culture is discussed in greater detail than the other cultures. Cultural pluralism is discussed in terms of such factors as language, history of the people, terminology in connection with the Spanish population, cultural differences with regard to the rest of the United States, religion, social mobility, and assimilation. Spanish American culture is compared to the Mexican American culture known elsewhere in the United States. Bibliographical notes on some general historical works about Mexican Americans of the Southwest or of New Mexico are appended. (NQ)

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New Mexico and Cultural Pluralism

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New Mexico and Cultural Pluralism

The State of New Mexico is a rich field for students of comparative and international education to examine "internationalism" and cultural diversity within the United States. The State is characterized by disparate cultural configurations and offers abundant material for an exploration of the possibilities of cultural pluralism in American life.

Language is perhaps the most index of cultural plurality. Spanish and English are the official languages of the State, making it the only officially bilingual state in the Union. Although English is the predominant language, Spanish and various Indian languages are commonly spoken in the streets of Albuquerque and bilingualism is a rather ordinary phenomenon. In many areas of the state, languages other than English are the primary media of communication. The long history of inter-cultural contact and interaction, moreover, has yielded numerous manifestations of cultural synthesis which are distinctly New Mexican and, thus, indiginously American.

At the close of the nineteenth century, Charles F. Lummis described New Mexico:

> Sun, silence, and adobe--that is New Mexico in three words. If a fourth were added, it need be only to clinch the three. It is the Great American Mystery--the National Rip Van Winkle--the United States which is not United States. Here is the land of poco tiempo--the home of "Pretty Soon." . . .
>
> New Mexico is the anomaly of the Republic. It is a century older in European civilization than the rest, and several centuries older still in a happier semi-civilization of its own. It had its little walled cities of stone before Columbus had grandparents-to-be; and it has them yet. The most incredible pioneering the world has ever seen overran it

with the zeal of a prairie-fire three hundred and fifty years ago; and the embers of that unparalleled blaze of exploration are not quite dead to-day. The most superhuman marches, the most awful privations, the most devoted heroism, the most unsleeping vigilance wrested this bare, brown land to the world; and having wrested it, went to sleep. The winning was the wakefullest in history--the after nap eternal. It never has wakened--one does not know that it ever can. . .[1]

Although New Mexico has not escaped the rapid changes and social thrusts of the twentieth century, change has taken place at dramatically differential rates; instances of "cultural lag" are legion and only until very recently life in many Mexican American and Indian communities went on in ways that were amazingly resistant to the intrusions of the present century. The way of life of Mexican Americans particularly has undergone radical transformation in the last few decades. Nevertheless, the noted historian Carey McWilliams argued in 1948 that the "Spanish-Indian-Mexican elements have a long life expectancy in the Southwest. New Mexico is the anchor for these elements: the rock upon which Spanish culture rests today."[2]

It is important to recall that the Mexican Americans of New Mexico (generally referred to as "Spanish Americans" in New Mexico and southern Colorado only) are not descendents of immigrants to the United States. New Mexico because part of the United States by conquest and the Mexican Americans there, consequently, are a "subsumed" American minority. Unlike the uprooted immigrants who left their homelands for America in search of a better life, as described by Oscar Handlin, Mexican American roots go deep into the history of New Mexico. The dislocations and alienation they have experienced as American citizens have been quite similar to the experiences of the "uprooted," but the U.S. had gone to them, rather than the reverse. And unlike many U.S. immigrants who adjusted to cultural stress by becoming as "American" as expeditiously and completely as possible, the Mexican Americans of New Mexico have preserved to a remarkable degree

a separate cultural identity. Despite the zealous efforts of educators to "standardize" them on a Mid-Western model, they have resisted complete assimilation into the dominant society.

The problem of terminology in connection with the New Mexican population known as la raza is an interesting one. An attempt to logically define "la raza" or even to find a generally acceptable name for its members borders on futility. Aside from the variety of vulgar terms which persist even in the loftiest halls of Academe, its members are known variously as "Spanish," "Manitos," "Spanish-Americans," "Latin-Americans," "Mexican-Americans," "Spanish surnamed," "Spanish-speaking," "Hispanos," "Spanish Colonials," "Chicanos," etc. And sometimes hyphens are not used, depending upon whether one regards the first part as a noun or an adjective. It should be readily apparent that each term is inaccurate from the standpoint of scholarship in some significant way.

The problem of what-to-call-whom is further compounded by attempts to mobilize la raza within New Mexico and throughout the nation as a political force. For many "activists," the choice and pronunciation of Spanish terms has become an important matter of principle. Largely through their efforts, the term "Mexican American" has become a generic term for American citizens or their offspring who have migrated to what is now the United States from what is now the republic of Mexico. "Chicano," from "Mexicano" has become a political term connoting "self awareness" and cultural assertion; "la raza," transcending socio-economic status, geography and history is the semantic umbrella which no one dares try to define lest the definition be divisive.

In the State of New Mexico, most citizens have traditionally been placed in one of three simple categories: Indians, Anglo-Americans (the non-descript dominant group, elsewhere known Americans without qualifica-

tion or as "anglos") and "Spanish Americans." The latter term emerged in New Mexico sometime after World War I to differentiate the Mexican Americans of New Mexico from Mexican immigrants who were immigrating to the Southwest in large numbers as a result of social turmoil in Mexico. The influx of race-conscious Anglos, moreover, also contributed to the new name; the term "Spanish-American" helped to deflect discrimination and submerge cultural conflict. For some, no doubt, the term served to recognize the unique history of New Mexico. But for others, especially the Hispanic middle-class, "Spanish American" reflected an effort to dis-associate from the subordinate social status that went along with being "Mexican." Today, Mexican Americans in New Mexico not only prefer to be referred to as "Spanish" or "Spanish Americans," but, more importantly, think of themselves as such. It appears that "Mexican American" and "Chicano" are gaining in popular acceptability, but the terms nonetheless still illicit a degree of defensiveness and suspicion in New Mexico.

There has been renewed interest in not only examining cultural plurality in modern America, but also in entertaining possibilities of pluralism, i.e., encouraging cultural differences. There are signs that some educators in some places may begin moving away from the traditional commitment to American cultural homogeny toward a recognition that, as Vogel et al. put it, "America is a great country not because it is one people, but because it is many people. And it is the sense of cultural complexity and diversity that needs to be preserved."[3]

But in surveying the literature dealing with that complexity and diversity, contradictory omens appear. The first is obvious: After over a century of U.S. citizenship, the Mexican Americans of New Mexico have retained a separate identity. Many educational sociologists like to quibble about the concept of a Mexican American "culture" there or

elsewhere, but the fact remains that Mexican Americans remain outside the American "mainstream" and have developed and maintained divergent cultural patterns. They have a sense of who they are and are held together by certain social and cultural bonds.

> New Mexico occupies a uniquely important position in the pattern of American culture. Protected by geographic, social, and cultural isolation, the Spanish-speaking element was given a sufficient margin of time in which to make the transition from Hispano to Anglo rule so that much of their cultural heritage has been preserved. . . . The Hispano element is too numerous . . ., in relation to the Anglos, to be absorbed piecemeal and Hispano cultural influences are now too deeply impressed upon the land to be obliterated.[4]

The Spanish language is a vital element of the Mexican American community in New Mexico. As late as 1938, less than three percent of the elementary school children in Taos County spoke English.[5] The census of 1940 was the last which counted the "mother tongue" of the Spanish surnamed population and, consequently, language and surnames are not directly comparable. The consensus, however, among students of the Southwest is that the correlation is quite high in the Southwest and this is true of New Mexico as well. It should be pointed out that many Mexican Americans have been "schooled" to believe that Spanish was undesirable in some sense and, indeed, a handicap. Incredibly, many teachers attempted to teach Mexican American children English by trying to irradicate their Spanish! Thus, many Mexican Americans, particularly the generation that served in World War II, have tended to suppress their Spanish language proficiencies; and Spanish is still considered "low prestige." Among the Mexican Americans of New Mexico, the Spanish language is generally viable, but it is also regretably not the case among what appears to be a growing number of children at least in Albuquerque.

If the Mexican Americans of N.M. can be induced to participate in the incipient Mexican American social and political assertion that is developing nationally (including abandoning the "pure Spanish" myth), it may be that Mexican Americans in New Mexico will rejuvenate the Spanish language. There is still time to preserve it in New Mexico, but the Mexican Americans will have to be taught that this is a worthy goal as well as they were taught that Spanish was a liability. In this case, it is fortunate that schools are as ineffective as they are because it gives us an opportunity to repair the damage of decades.

The Catholic religion historically has been a pivotal ingredient of the Mexican American culture in N.M. Mexican Americans in large numbers are reportedly disassociating from the Catholic Church. But in N.M., according to Gonzales,

> It seems clear from a general survey of the literature that the percentage of Roman Catholics is probably still close to 75% of their total number. Depending upon one's point of view, this could be considered evidence of strong retention of the religion or a remarkable conversion rate, considering that these people were close to being 100% Catholic in 1846!

Catholic affiliation and practices may or may not be desirable in themselves. But in considering the critical role of the Church in the Mexican American culture in N.M. and the fact that Mexican Americans in New Mexico constitute an exception to the emerging pattern of Mexican American disassociation elsewhere, it is reasonable to infer that religion is one positive indicator of Mexican American cultural viability in New Mexico.

The ratio of the Mexican American population to the total population consistently has been by far the highest in New Mexico. Their sheer numbers and geographic concentration have been powerful factors in cultural conservatism. The processes of urbanization, moreover, have

taken place more slowly in N.M. than elsewhere and even slower for Mexican Americans. As the economic base of Mexican villagers (most of whom had little contact with Anglos until World War II) deteriorated, an increasing number migrated to the cities. The cultural forces which held them together--religion, language, ethnicity, kinship, ties with the land--were transplanted in to an urban scene. And here again the common acculturative effects of urbanization have taken place more slowly due to the fewness and smallness of New Mexican cities. Although that historic culture assumed features in many cases of a "poverty culture," urban and rural poverty has never been as pervasive as it has among Mexican Americans elsewhere. Thus, wholesale assimilation has not yet taken place, allowing another opportunity to keep American life diverse at least in New Mexico.

In considering the viability of cultural pluralism in New Mexico and the United States, it is of utmost importance not to lose sight of the fact that Mexican Americans in N.M. are beset by complex social problems resulting in their inability to enjoy the full measure of the benefits this country offers. Although Mexican Americans have retained their identity, one must acknowledge that those who have gained access to the amenities of American life are generally those who are more completely assimilated. In other words, there is an embarrasing correlation, from the standpoint of pluralism, between vertical social mobility and acculturation. Unless a third alternative is made available and encouraged in the form of competence (linguistic, economic, etc.) across cultures, cultural diversity will serve only as an index of the intolerable conditions of poverty and failure.

The historic "timelessness" of New Mexico has captured the imagination of the Romantics and frustrated the efforts of modern "change agents." The continued economic and social subordination of Mexican Americans in New Mexico is unacceptable. But that same "timelessness" and "cultural lag" gives us a great deal to work with--a base--to foster cultural diversity. Mexican Americans in New Mexico have a political tradition (another exception to the general Southwestern pattern), and a sense of ethnic pride as well as a deep identification with America. These are essential ingredients for viable cultural pluralism. It is the author's contention that if cultural pluralism, i.e., diversity without the penality of failure, is not viable in New Mexico it is not viable anywhere else in the United States. This is the significance of the New Mexican experience for the nation.

It may very well be that cultural pluralism is not viable; that the standardizing forces of "mass culture" and the imperatives of modern technology are pre-eminent. But we don't know and the possibilities are worth examining. This is where the special skills and "insights" of comparative and international education students are needed, as suggested by Wilson in the previous issue of the Journal. Aside from scholarly investigations of cultural diversity which are needed, to be sure, international education scholars can play an important political role within the academic community, and one which they are admirably qualified to perform. They are in an excellent position to enjoin their colleagues in colleges of education to offer a variety of teacher education programs to include studies in the educational problems of cultural minorities in America. They are in an excellent position to combat the ethnocentrism and cultural myopia that ~~is~~ are endemic in the teaching profession. Such

ethnocentrism and myopia have not only been pedagogically disastrous for minority groups and precluded teaching effectiveness, but it might be desirable for the teacher's own education to recognize at least that there are other possibilities in the world other than those offered in a particular community in the American Heartland. Finally, they are in an excellent position to encourage prospective teachers and students of education to at least entertain the desirability of cultural diversity, to study ways in which teachers can participate in the solution of social problems and, above all, to develop ways of fostering pluralism in American life.

Footnotes

[1]Charles F. Lummis, The Land of Poco Tiempo (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), pp. 1-2.

[2]Carey McWilliams, North from Mexico (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), p.80.

[3]Albert W. Vogel, John T. Zepper and David L. Bachelor (eds.), Foundations of Education/A Social View (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1970), p. X.

[4]McWilliams, Loc. Cit.

[5]Gladys A. Wiggin, Education and Nationalism (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962), p. 448.

[6]Nancie L. Gonzalez, The Spanish-Americans of New Mexico/A Heritage of Pride (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), pp. 173-174.

Some Bibliographical Notes

A comprehensive history of the Mexican Americans of the Southwest or of the State of New Mexico has yet to be written. Some general historical works which are easily available include H. B. Bolton's Spanish Explorations in the Southwest (1916) and The Spanish Borderlands (1921). W. Eugene Hollow's The Southwest: Old and New (1961) and Paul Horgan's Great River--the Rio Grande in North America (1954) are popular regional historical works. Carey McWilliam's North from Mexico (1968) is perhaps the best cultural history of the Mexican Americans of the Southwest and it offers a provocative description of social injustice in American life.

Prominent historical works of New Mexico include H. H. Bancroft's definitive History of Arizona and New Mexico, but this was published in 1899. Frank D. Reeve's two-volume History of New Mexico, published in 1961, is comprehensive, but apparently it was published in limited editions. Warren A. Beck's New Mexico, A History of Four Centuries (1962) is a highly readable and short cultural history which is a good beginning text. It is noteworthy to point out that both Reeve and Beck see little future for the Mexican American culture in New Mexico, Reeve is committed to the "Melting Pot" ideal and sees its workings as inevitable and Beck sees it doomed to extinction as a result of the social thrusts of modern America. Other works are George P. Hammond's Don Juan de Onate and The Founding of New Mexico (1927). Bolton's definitive Coronodo, Knight of the Pueblos and Plains (1949) and many excellent articles in the New Mexico Historical Review, especially those by Fray Angelico Chavez and France V. Scholes. Two recent books which are of interest are Marc Simmon's Spanish Government in New Mexico (1968) which treats the political ties between Spain, Mexico and New Mexico and

Michael Jenkenson's Tijerina: Land Grant Conflict in New Mexico is a valuable treatment of the land grant dispute and of the fiery Reis Lopez Tijerina who emerged in the 60's as the leader of an abortive nativistic movement that captured national attention. L. S. Tireman's Community School in a Spanish-Speaking Village (1948) which describes a unique experiment in culturally appropriate pedagogy has recently been republished by the New Mexico Press, as has been George I. Sanchez' classic Forrotten People: A Study of New Mexicans. Gladys Wiggins' Education and Nationalism (1962) has a short chapter on New Mexico and describes the attempted "anglicization" of the Mexican Americans through the schools.

The best bibliographical reference is Lyle Sauders' Guide to Materials on Cultural Relations in New Mexico (1940).

More general bibliographical compilations are E. G. Navarro's Annotated Bibliography of Materials of the Mexican Americans (1969), published by the Center for Latin American Studies at Stanford University in 1969 and the invaluable Report of the Mexican-American Study Project, published in 1967 at the University of California (Los Angeles). The latter offers useful statistical data as well as the most comprehensive bibliography available.

Recent works which deserve particular attention are Mexican-Americans in the United States (1970) which is an admirable anthology edited by John H. Burma (including an insightful "Comparison of the Mexican-American Subculture with the Oscar Lewis Culture of Poverty" by the editor) and La Raza: Forgotten Americans (1966), a reader edited by Julian Samora (including a provocative essay by George I. Sanchez, "History, Culture and Education"). Nancie L. Gonzalez' The Spanish Americans of New Mexico, A Heritage of Pride (1967) offers very useful and interesting sociological analysis.